(c) whether the BSNL proposes to cover some more towns under its Cellular Programme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) Current cellular programme of BSNL under execution envisages the coverage of 1031 cities in the country. Additional cities will be considered for coverage in future expansion programme depending upon their business viability.

Free internet connection

944. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:
DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in some countries like USA, free internet connection is provided to students and senior citizens;

(b) if so, whether Government have any proposal to introduce similar facility in India; and

(c) if not, whether Government would consider it for implementation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI SU. THIRUNAVUKKARASAR): (a) As per the information provided by ISPAI (Internet Services Providers Associations of India) there is the 'E-rate' programme, established by the bipartisan Snowe-Kerrey amendment to the Telecom Act of 1996 in the USA. It provides 20% to 90% discounts on telecommunications services, internet access and internal connections to schools and public libraries. Besides, most universities and colleges in many countries offer free internet access to students, faculty and staff not only on the campus but also from homes, dormitories and hostels. However, ISPAI are not

aware of any specific scheme for providing free internet access to senior citizens.

(b) and (c) Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) is the biggest Government ISP. Presently they have no plans to introduce the internet connections to students and senior citizens in the country.

Internet Node in Tamil Nadu

945.SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to set up Internet Node at Sivaganga and Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (c) An Internet Node catering to Dial up customers is already operational at Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu. There is no plan to provide separate Internet Node at Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu since internet access at Tirupattur is already available on local call basis.

Bifurcation of Rural Telecom Sector

946. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) through a recent order has deprived more than 80 lakh subscribers of the status of 'Rural subscribers' by bifurcating the 'Rural' Telecom sector;

(b) whether earlier telecom sector was classified into two major categories as 'Urban' and 'Rural' based on census reports;